

THE JOURNEY WEST

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DURING the Mormon pioneer period, 1846-68, nearly eighty thousand Saints crossed the plains. Unlike others who had crossed the Great American Desert, the Saints were religiously motivated and took entire families in their westward trek. Men, women, and children walked over one thousand miles to the Great Salt Lake Valley. During this time the Mormon Battalion was formed, company after company of pioneers left Winter Quarters and subsequent gathering points for the West, and the Saints established their sanctuary in the Rocky Mountains. Their diaries and journals reveal in eloquent simplicity a faith born of the sacrifice of all they possessed for the kingdom of God.

HIGHLIGHTS

1846 Feb. 4: The first group of Saints leaves Nauvoo and crosses the Mississippi. The ship *Brooklyn* sets sail from New York Harbor.

July 15-16: The Mormon Battalion enlists at Winter Quarters.

July 29: The *Brooklyn* arrives at Yerba Buena Harbor (San Francisco Bay).

Aug. 12: The Battalion leaves Fort Leavenworth for Sante Fe, New Mexico.

Nov. 17: The Battalion's sick detachment arrives at Pueblo, Colorado, where it spends the winter.

1847 Jan. 29: The battalion arrives at San Diego.

Apr. 16: The pioneer company begins the trek west.

July 16: Part of the battalion discharged at San Diego.

July 19: (Monday) Orson Pratt and John Brown see the Great Salt Lake Valley.

July 21: (Wednesday) Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow enter the valley.

July 22: (Thursday) A small scouting party enters the valley.

July 23: (Friday) The advance group enters the valley and camps. Orson Pratt dedicates the land to the Lord and the brethren begin plowing and planting.

July 24: (Saturday) Brigham Young and the main camp enter the valley.

July 29: The Battalion's sick detachment and the Mississippi Saints arrive in the valley.

Aug. 27: Brigham Young and 107 men leave the Great Salt Lake Valley for Winter Quarters.

Dec. 23: The Twelve issue a general epistle.

1848 Jan. 24: Battalion members participate in gold discovery in California.

Sept. 20: President Young arrives at Great Salt Lake Valley.

1849 Apr. 4: The first of the fourteen general epistles is issued.

1856 June 9: The first handcart company leaves Florence, Nebraska and arrives in Salt Lake 26 September.

Dec. 10: The last of the fourteen general epistles issued.

1860 July 10: The last handcart company leaves Florence, Nebraska, and arrives in Salt Lake 24 September.

1861 The first Church train, comprising two hundred wagons, leaves with flour to sell in the East and returns with immigrant Saints in the fall.

1868 The last Church-sponsored wagon train, comprising two hundred wagons, leaves with flour to sell in the East, returning with four thousand immigrant Saints in the fall.

1869 Mar. 8: The Union Pacific Railroad reaches Ogden, Utah.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Coming to Zion

The Saints employed five basic means of travel to reach the Great Basin: ship, wagon train, handcart, "Church trains," and railroad transportation. "Church trains" were essentially the same as the earlier wagon trains except that the Church called men to a summer mission, and wards in Salt Lake City and vicinity outfitted wagons, teams and provisions to ferry the immigrants across the plains.

Some Saints traveled via ocean from New York to California; one ship, the *Brooklyn*, left New York Harbor 4 February 1846 with 238 passengers bound for California with the intent of joining the Nauvoo pioneers after they reached the West. Interestingly, both pioneer groups began their journey the same day. The *Brooklyn* sailed via Cape Horn to the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands, finally arriving at Yerba Buena (San Francisco) on 29 July 1846. During the nearly six-month voyage, ten Latter-day Saints lost their lives. The Saints who booked passage aboard the *Brooklyn* were primarily American farmers and mechanics from the eastern states. They took with them tools necessary to continue their lifestyle in the West: plows and other farm implements, blacksmith tools, equipment for a saw mill, a printing press, and school books. After their arrival at Yerba Buena, the group moved inland a short distance, founded their own colony, naming it New Hope, and there awaited for over a year the arrival of the Nauvoo Saints, who had settled temporarily at Winter Quarters along the Missouri River.

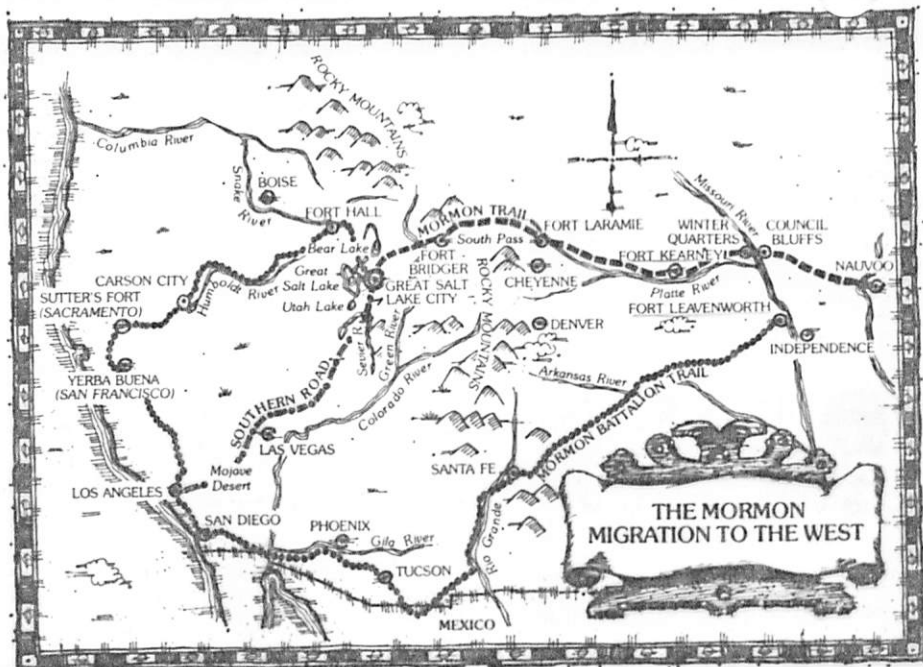
At Winter Quarters the Nauvoo Saints surveyed a town of eight hundred twenty lots and constructed a large stockade and seven hundred log homes before Christmas of 1846, pro-

viding shelter for over three thousand five hundred Saints. A high council presided over the ecclesiastical, municipal, and educational needs of the community, while a police force maintained order. Tragically, many of the Saints were near destitute, and poor diets contributed to the deaths of over six hundred. John R. Young described Winter Quarters as "the Valley Forge of Mormondom" (John R. Young, *Memoirs of John R. Young, Utah Pioneer*, 1847, p. 41).

The Mormon Battalion

While the Saints were gathering to Winter Quarters in 1846, the United States government sought their help in the war with Mexico, asking them to raise a battalion to march to California. In the middle of July 1846, 549 men enlisted in the United States Army, forming the Mormon Battalion. These men, along with 33 women and 51 children, left Winter Quarters for California on 20 July. They traveled from Winter Quarters to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where the battalion was officially outfitted for their trip west, and thence to Santa Fe, Tucson, and finally to San Diego, 29 January 1847. At least three sick detachments left the battalion between Santa Fe and Tucson and made their way to Pueblo, Colorado, where they

The Mormon Battalion enlists



spent the winter of 1846-47 and joined the pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley in the summer of 1847.

While the battalion did not formally engage in fighting in the Mexican War, its members experienced many hardships and moments of intrigue that proved their mettle. For example, when the battalion reached the Rio Grande 10 November 1846, they continued following the road that led south into Mexico for the next several days. The men feared that they would continue on course to Mexico instead of continuing on to California and subsequently would not be able to rejoin their families. Levi Hancock, a member of the First Council of Seventy, and David Pettegrew visited each tent and encouraged each soldier to fast, praying to the Lord that he change the route of travel toward California, and soon the battalion was heading west again. Another incident occurred just prior to the battalion's arrival in Tucson, Arizona, where they were attacked by a group of wild bulls. During the fight, the bulls wounded two men and the soldiers killed from thirty to sixty bulls.

Colonel Cooke's Tribute

Weary and greatly emaciated, the battalion finally arrived 29 January 1847 at San Diego, California. The next day Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, commander of the group, commended the Saints for their devotion and fortitude:

Headquarters
"Mormon" Battalion
Mission of San Diego,
January 30, 1847.

ORDERS NO. 1.

The Lieutenant-Colonel commanding congratulates the battalion on their safe arrival on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, and the conclusion of their march of over two thousand miles.

History may be searched in vain for an equal march of infantry. Half of it has been through a wilderness where nothing but savages and wild beasts are found, or deserts where, for want of water, there is no living creature. There, with almost hopeless labor we have dug deep wells, which the future traveler will enjoy. Without a guide who had traversed them, we have ventured into trackless tablelands where water was not found for several marches. With crowbar and pick and axe in hand, we have worked our way over mountains, which seemed to defy aught save the wild goat, and hewed a passage through a chasm of living rock more narrow than our wagons. To bring these first wagons to the Pacific, we have preserved the strength of our mules by herding them over large tracts, which you have laboriously guarded without loss. The garrison of four presidios of Sonora concentrated within the

walls of Tucson, gave us no pause. We drove them out, with their artillery, but our intercourse with the citizens was unmarked by a single act of injustice. Thus, marching half naked and half fed, and living upon wild animals, we have discovered and made a road of great value to our country.

Arrived at the first settlement of California, after a single day's rest, you cheerfully turned off from the route to this point of promised repose, to enter upon a campaign, and meet, as we supposed, the approach of the enemy; and this too, without even salt to season your sole subsistence of fresh meat.

Lieutenant A. J. Smith and George Stonemen, of the First Dragoons, have shared and given valuable aid in all these labors.

Thus, volunteers, you have exhibited some high and essential qualities of veterans. But much remains undone. Soon, you will turn your attention to the drill, to system and order, to forms also, which are all necessary to the soldier. [Philip St. George Cooke, *The Conquest of New Mexico and California*, p. 197]

Once in San Diego, battalion members diffused into two areas: some remaining there, others being stationed in Los Angeles. As their enlistments expired, the men were encouraged to reenlist for another year, which some did. Others journeyed directly to Salt Lake Valley, while others sought employment and remained in California another year before they went to Salt Lake or returned to Winter Quarters. Members of this last-named group participated in the discovery of gold in California.

The Pioneers

While the battalion experienced its hardships in crossing what has become the southwestern United States, the Saints at Winter Quarters began to prepare for the trek west as soon as spring arrived. On 14 January 1847, Brigham Young received a revelation from the Lord relative to the Saints' westward journey (see D&C 136). In this revelation, the Lord required his people to keep his commandments and statutes (see verse 2). He com-

manded that the traveling camps of Zion be organized with captains of groups of one hundred, fifty, and ten, and that travel proceed under the direction of the Twelve. The Lord commanded the Saints to provide for themselves food, clothing, provisions, teams, wagons, and other necessities (see verse 5). When they were organized, the Lord commanded the "captains and presidents" to decide how many Saints would go west the next spring (verses 6-7). Each company received its share of responsibilities to bear the burden of "the poor, the widows, the fatherless and the families" of those men who had enlisted in the army (verses 8-9). The Lord gave the Saints rules of conduct, commanded them not to fear their enemies, and told them that he would prove them in all things (verses 20-42).

Following this revelation, the pioneers organized themselves and on 16 April 1847 began to move west. This advance company, led by President Young and consisting of 143 men, 3 women, and 2 children, traveled fast and founded a settlement in the Great Basin, arriving at their destination 21-24 July 1847. Families made up the majority of the other ten companies that came in 1847 and the companies that came in the ensuing years. The Saints came by the thousands,

young and old, sick and healthy. Women walked by the side of their husbands and on occasion drove their own teams. Children walked by their parents, suffering fatigue, hunger, starvation, and even death with them.

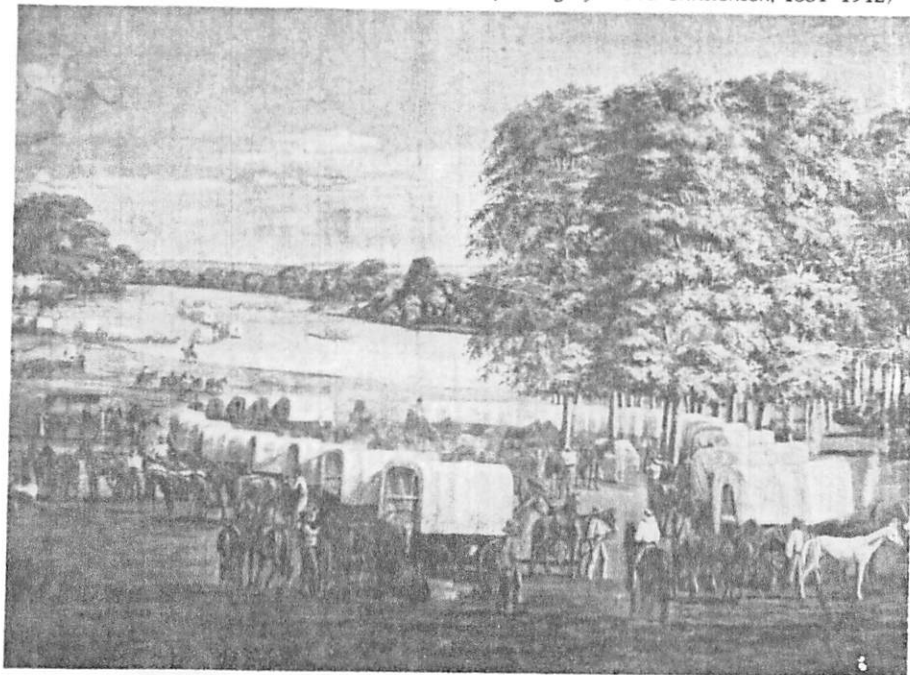
Journal of Mary Ann Weston Maughan

One such pioneer family was Mary Ann Weston Maughan's. The following excerpt from the journal account of her family's 1850 migration to the West well illustrates the sacrifices and the spirit of the pioneers.

[June] 19th. This morning we had a powerful rain; commenced at breakfast time and continued till near noon. Started in the afternoon. On the way passed the grave of Bro. Warren, who died of cholera. This is the 1st grave we have seen. Traveled 8 miles. Camped on a small stream.

21st. We were called to bury 2 of our company who died of cholera this morning, a man named Brown and a child. There are more sick in camp. Have been in sight of the Platte river all day. Traveled 15 miles, camped on Salt Creek. Soon some of our company came up with another child dead. They buried it at twilight on the bank of the creek. There are more sick. It makes us feel sad thus to bury our friends by the way. Weather very hot.

The pioneers crossing the Platte River in Nebraska (painting by C.C.A. Christensen, 1831-1912)



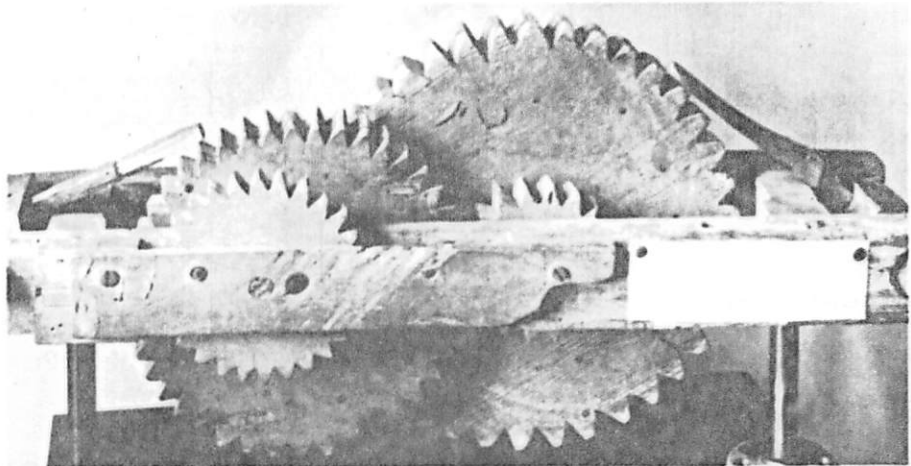
22nd. This morning before starting we were called to bury 3 more children. They all belonged to one family. We started late and before all had crossed the creek it commenced to rain very hard. We were detained till noon. Traveled 9 miles, camped on the Paria without wood or water, or some that is very poor. This is the worst time we have had since we crossed the Missouri river. Every thing wet and several sick in camp. Very little fire.

23rd. We buried 3 more this evening. Traveled 8 miles.

24th. This morning is wet and uncomfortable. It was thought best to remain in camp. Some are washing and baking, all were busy. About noon it cleared up and we had a public meeting in camp. Some fasted and humbled themselves before the Lord and prayed that He would remove disease from us. Brother Crandall said in four days five of his family had been taken from their midst and requested the Brethren to pray that the other members of his family might be spared.

25th. The mother of the three children spoke of yesterday died this afternoon. She will be buried this evening. We are camped on a creek which we call Pleasant Point. Here we buried Sister Spafford, the mother of nine children. There are no more sick in camp and we hope the worst is over. Traveled 10 miles...

July 12th. About noon as we were traveling along on a good plain road, my little Peter, about three years old, was sitting in the front of the wagon between his brother Charles and his sister Mary Ann. They were looking at a cow that had lost one horn. He leaned forward, lost his balance, and fell before the wheels. The first passed over him and he tried to escape the other one. But alas the wagon stopped just as the hind wheel stood on his dear little back. The Brethren from behind ran up and lifted the wheel and took him from under it. He was bruised internally so that it was impossible for him to live long. We done all that was possible for him, but no earthly power could save



An odometer of the type used by the pioneers to measure the distance they traveled

him. He did not suffer much pain, only twice for a very little time. The people left their wagons and gathered around mine, and all wept for the dear little boy that we knew must soon leave us. I had talked to him many times to be careful and not fall out of the wagon, or he might be hurt very bad. He only spoke twice. I said to him, "Pete, did you fall?" and he said, "Yes," and seemed to know that he would leave us, and asked for his father. I did not know that his father had fainted, for the Brethren stood to hide him from my sight. On my asking for him, they said he would come soon. As soon as he was able he came to the wagon, covered with dust. But his little boy could not speak to him. He opened his eyes and looked so lovingly at us, then gently closed them and passed peacefully away, and left us weeping around his dear little bruised body. Then loving hands tenderly dressed him in a suit of his own white linen clothes. He looked so lovely. I emptied a dry goods box and Bro. Wood made him a nice coffin; and it even was a mournful satisfaction, for we had seen our brothers and sisters bury their dear ones without a coffin to lay them in. We buried him on a little hill on the North side of the road. The grave was consecrated and then they laid him to rest. Some one had made a nice headboard, with his name printed on, also his age and date of death. This was all we could do, and many prayers were offered to our heavenly Father, that he might rest in peace and not be disturbed by

wolves. We turned away in sorrow and grief. A few days after, we heard that his grave had not been touched, but another little one made beside it, and afterwards some more were buried by them. This was a great satisfaction to us, to know that he remained as we left him. Our dear one's name was Peter Weston Maughan, born in New Diggings, Wisconsin Territory, May 20th, 1847....

[August] 8th. I was very sick this morning with the Mountain fever. As I lay in my wagon today I thought the wheels went over every rock there was in the road. Camped in the Black Hills. After camping, Mr. Maughan laid my bed in the shade of the wagon. On the outside, chains were fastened across the wheels to keep some sheep in. Thinking my bed would stop them, my wagon wheels were not chained. Seeing a open place, the sheep darted through and every one sprang over me. I clasped my baby close to me, lay still and was not hurt, not even touched by one of them. I think the sheep were worse frightened than I was.

10th. Today we came up with Bennett's Company. They have the whooping cough among them. We drove off the road while they passed....

17th. This morning we entered the canyon and traveled on the most dreadful road imaginable. Some places we had to make the road before we could pass. Passed the toll gate and paid for passing over the road we had made. We had a

Sustain the government of the nation wherever you are, and speak well of it, for this is right, and the government has a right to expect it of you, so long as that government sustains you in your civil and religious liberty, in those rights which inherently belong to every person born on the earth; and if you are persecuted in your native land, and denied the privilege of worshipping the true God in spirit and in truth, flee to the land of Zion, to America—to the United States, where constitutional rights and freedoms are not surpassed by any nation—where God saw fit, in these last days, to renew the dispensation of salvation, by revelations from the heavens, and where all, by the constitution and laws of the land, when executed in righteousness, are protected in all the civil and religious freedom that man is capable of enjoying on earth; and our national institutions will never fail, unless it be through the wickedness of the people, and the designs of evil men in brief authority; for those rights were ordained of God on this land, for the establishment of the principles of truth on the earth; and our national organization originated in the heavens. [From the Seventh General Epistle, 18 Apr. 1852, in Clark, *Messages*, 2:98]

Let the Saints take courage and avail themselves of the privilege of gathering to this place while the way is open before them, for the time will come when whoso would gather to Zion must needs flee with his budget upon his shoulder, or under his arm. Verily, they will come like flocks of doves to the windows, comparatively bare and naked, without food or clothing, escaping, as it were by the skin of their teeth, from the righteous indignation of an offending Deity poured out upon and passing over a wicked and adulterous generation. [From the Fourteenth General Epistle, 10 Dec. 1856, in Clark, *Messages*, 2:199]

The Perpetual Emigration Fund

About one month since we suggested the propriety of creating a perpetual fund for the purpose of helping the poor Saints to emigrate to this place, agreeably to our cov-

enants in the Temple that we would "never cease our exertions, by all the means and influence within our reach, till all the Saints who were obliged to leave Nauvoo should be located at some gathering place of the Saints." The Council approved of the suggestion, and a committee was immediately appointed to raise a fund by voluntary contribution to be forwarded east next mail. The October Conference sanctioned the doings of the committee, and appointed Brother Edward Hunter, a tried, faithful, and approved Bishop, a general agent to bear the perpetual emigrating funds to the States, to superintend the direction and appropriation thereof, and return the same to this place with such poor brethren as shall be wisdom to help.

We wish all to understand, that this fund is PERPETUAL, and is never to be diverted from the object of gathering the poor to Zion while there are Saints to be gathered, unless He whose right it is to rule shall otherwise command. Therefore we call upon President Orson Hyde and all the Saints, and all benevolent souls everywhere, to unite their gold, their silver, and their cattle, with ours in this perpetual fund, and cooperate with Bishop Hunter in producing as many teams as possible, preparatory for next spring's emigration, and let the poor who are to be helped, go to work with their might, and prepare wagons of wood for their journey.

Such wagons, without any iron, now exist in this valley, that have come from the states, having done good business; and so great has been the influx of wagons this season, that they are cheap, and iron comparatively plentiful. [From the Second General Epistle, 12 Oct. 1849, in Clark, *Messages*, 2:34–35]

Every possible exertion will be made on our part, and that of the Emigrating Company, to extend the usefulness of the Perpetual Fund in gathering the Saints; and it is important that those who anticipate help therefrom, should understand that the means sent forth are, and will be designed to furnish teams, almost or quite exclusively; and even the cases in which wagons will be furnished will be rare. The poor who can live in the States with little clothing, and little or no groceries, &c., can live equally as cheap on the road; and when once here, can procure the comforts of life by their industry. Souls are the articles for the Perpetual Fund to gather home, and that, too, as many as possible; and other things will be attended to in their time and place.



We are under obligation by covenant, firstly to apply the Perpetual Funds, gathered in this country, to bring home the poor Saints who were driven from Nauvoo; and as soon as this shall be accomplished, we shall be ready to extend our exertions to other places and countries. Let the European Saints continue to add to their Perpetual Funds, which we doubt not they have commenced according to our previous counsel; and as soon as sufficient shall be collected to remove a suitable company, we will give instructions concerning its application, and emigration will commence. [From the Fourth General Epistle, 27 Sept. 1850, in Clark, *Messages*, 2:60-61]

This ever rising, ever increasing desire for the gathering of the remnants of Israel pertains unto all the Saints of God, who live their religion and enjoy the rich blessings of the Holy Ghost. It is in the heart of every faithful Saint, their constant prayer to the Almighty Father to enable them, not only to promulgate the Gospel of Christ to those who sit in darkness, but to gather out the honest in heart, even the Israel of God, from their long dispersion and to aid them in returning to a knowledge of the Lord God of their Fathers, that they may participate in the society of the Saints and a peaceful inheritance in these sequestered vales. To this end, and the further accomplishment of this object, are continually directed the efforts of the Perpetual Emigrating

Fund Company for the emigration of the honest and worthy poor—those who desire to serve God and keep His commandments, being full of virtue and integrity towards God and their brethren. These are those we wish to deliver from the oppression of wicked Babylon, whose vital energies the proud and powerful are crushing out; upon whom the despotism, bigotry, ignorance and superstition of the world hang like an incubus, and to bring them to a land where manhood though found in poverty is respected, and where the God of Heaven can receive the homage due from man to his Maker; where freedom and liberty of conscience can enjoy protection, honest and faithful labour meet a just equivalent, and where the light of revelation and power of the Holy and Eternal Priesthood hold the adversary of truth in abeyance and roll back the curtains of error and darkness, sin, and death which have so long enveloped the earth. [From the Fourteenth General Epistle, 10 Dec. 1856, in Clark, *Messages*, 2:198]

The Work on the Temple

We contemplate erecting a wall around the Temple block this season, preparatory to laying the foundation of the Temple the year following; and this we will be sure to do, if all the Saints shall prove themselves as ready to pay their tithing, and sacrifice and consecrate of their substance, as freely as we will; and if the Saints do not pay their tithing, we can neither build nor prepare for building; and if



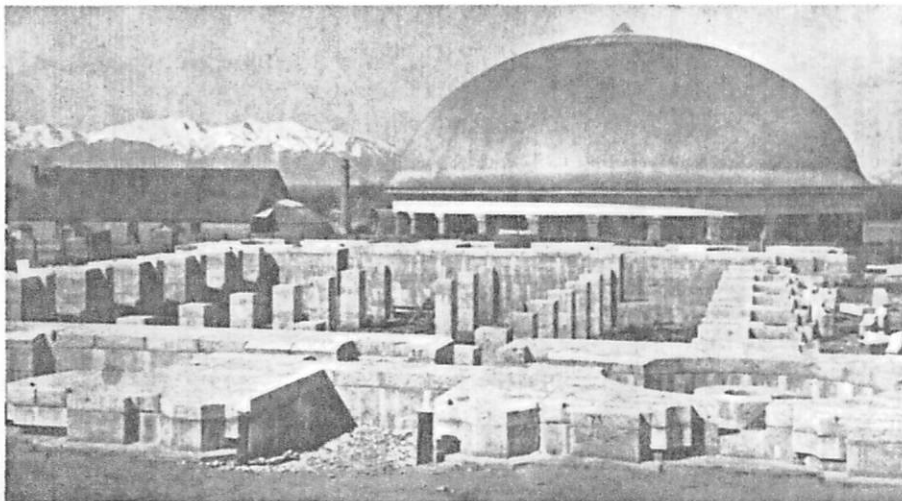
Quarrying the granite blocks for the Salt Lake Temple

there shall be no Temple built, the Saints can have no endowments; and if they do not receive their endowments, they can never attain unto that salvation they are anxiously looking for. So far as the Saints in the United States and Canada desire to see the work of the Lord prosper, let them arise as one man, and come to Deseret, where they can do more for Zion in one year than they can in many years where they are. [From the Fifth General Epistle, 7 Apr. 1851, in Clark, *Messages*, 2:71]

After the opening of the Conference by singing and prayer in the Tabernacle, the general authorities of the Church, surrounded by escorts, guards, police, martial music, instrumental bands, and choir, with the National Flag unfurled from its topmost staff, the ensigns of the various bands and escorts floating in the breeze, and the banner of "Zion's Workmen" towering aloft, proceeded to the Temple ground, and after singing by the choir, the First Presidency laid the South East Corner Stone of the Temple...

The Corner Stones now rest in their several positions, about sixteen feet below the surface of the eastern bank, beneath the reach of mountain floods, when the edifice shall be completed, and so deep beneath

The foundation of the temple, the "old" (left) and "new" (right) tabernacles looking west



the surface, that it will cost robbers and mobs too much labour to raze it to its foundation, leaving not one stone upon another, as they did with the Temple at Jerusalem.

The work for the redemption and salvation of Israel has commenced, as it were, anew on the earth, which makes Satan mad, and causes devils to howl. But their doleful moans are not heeded by the Saints in the mountains, their hearts are cheered to press forward with all their energies, to complete the Lord's House, as speedily as possible. . . .

The Holy Spirit has been in our midst, and the revelations of Jesus have guided His Apostles and Prophets, in laying the Corner Stones of the Temple, and ministering unto the Saints, during Conference, in an unusual degree, which has caused much gladness of heart, and great joy and rejoicing. And that same Spirit will accompany this our Epistle, and be felt, and experienced to the joy of your hearts, even by all who will receive our testimony, and practice those precepts which we inculcate. [From the Ninth General Epistle, 13 Apr. 1853, in Clark, *Messages*, 2:115, 117]

During the General Conference, just closed, the younger people were counselled to obtain their endowments and marry; hence we wish it understood that we are prepared to give the Saints their endowments in the House of the Lord, which has been built and dedicated expressly for that purpose; therefore, let parents, guardians, and Bishops take this matter properly in hand, and counsel freely with the young people, and prepare them to receive their endowments and sealings. Young men, take unto yourselves wives of the daughters of Zion, and come up and receive your endowments and sealings, that you may raise up a holy seed unto the God of Abraham, even a holy and royal Priesthood who shall be born legal heirs thereunto, having a right to the keys thereof, and to administer in all the ordinances pertaining to the House of the Lord. Cease your folly and become men of God;

act wisely and righteously before Him, and His choice blessings will attend you.

We exhort all the Saints to live righteously, to remember and keep their covenants with their God and with each other, to pay their tithing and make their consecrations in the spirit of liberality and in all good conscience, nothing doubting. [From the Thirteenth General Epistle, 29 Oct. 1855, in Clark, *Messages*, 2:186-87]

The Migration Continues

By 1856 the cost of outfitting a team, a wagon, and provisions in the East had more than doubled because of the heavy migration resulting from the discovery of gold in California and the announcement of free land in Oregon. Responding to the increased costs, Brigham Young suggested that the Saints travel across the plains pulling handcarts.

LeRoy Hafen explains what the handcarts were like:

The handcarts used by the different companies varied in size and construction, but the general pattern was uniform. The carts resembled those used by porters and street sweepers in the cities of the United States. They were constructed with little or no iron. The axles of many consisted of a single pole of hickory, without iron skeins. Some of the wheels were hooped with thin iron tires, others were not. Many of the

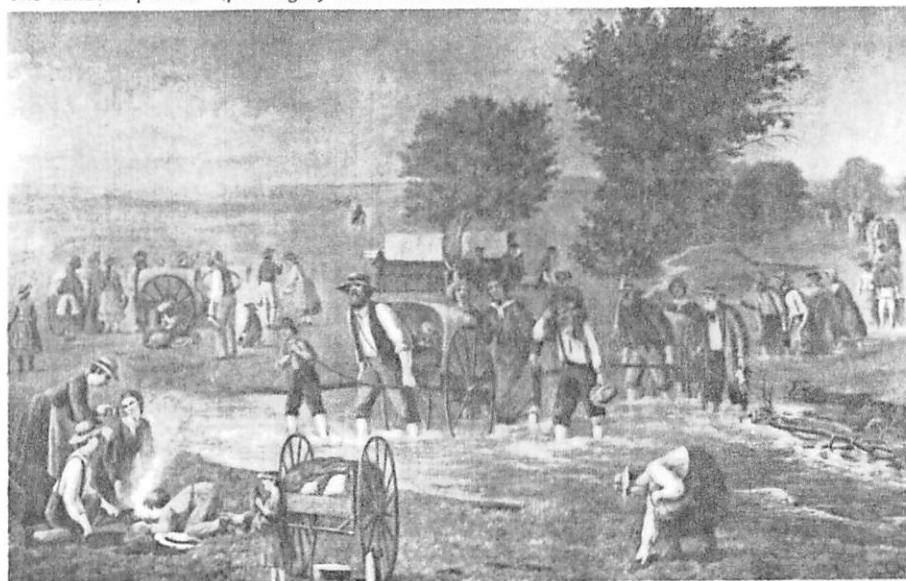
carts, made in a hurry and of unseasoned wood, shrank, warped, and cracked as they were drawn across the dry plains through the summer heat.

J. Rogerson, a veteran of the handcart emigration, gives the following description: "The open handcart was made of Iowa hickory or oak, the shafts and side pieces of the same material, but the axles generally of hickory. In length the side pieces and shafts were about six or seven feet, with three or four binding cross bars from the back part to the fore part of the body of the cart; then two or three feet space from the latter bar to the front bar or singletree for the lead horse or lead man, woman or boy of the team.

"The carts were the usual width of the wide track wagon. Across the bars of the bed of the cart we generally sewed a strip of bed ticking or a counterpane. On this wooden cart of a thimbleless axle, with about 2½ inch shoulder and 1 inch point, were often loaded 400 to 500 pounds of flour, bedding, extra clothing, cooking utensils and a tent. How the flimsy yankee hickory structure held up the load for the hundreds of miles has been a wonder to us since then.

"The covered or family cart was similar in size and construction with the exception that it was made stronger, with an iron axle. It was surmounted by a small wagon box 3

The handcart pioneers (painting by C.C.A. Christensen, 1831-1912)



or 4 feet long with side and end pieces about 8 inches high. Two persons were assigned to the pulling of each open cart, and where a father and son of age and strength were found in one family, with smaller children, they were allotted a covered cart, but in many instances the father had to pull the covered cart alone." [LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, pp. 53-55]

The first Mormon handcart company left Iowa City, 9 June 1856, and arrived in Salt Lake City 26 September 1856. Three companies crossed the plains without incident in 1856, but the last two companies led by James G. Willie and Edward Martin, leaving Iowa City in late July 1856, were caught by early snows in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. Their suffering and privation, reflected in the following two accounts, are unsurpassed in the annals of western migration.

Ephraim K. Hanks and the Martin Handcart Company

Ephraim Hanks, "one of the greatest of Mormon scouts" (Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, p. 135), recalled the rescue of the Martin handcart company:

In the fall of 1856, I spent considerable of my time fishing in Utah Lake; and in traveling backward and forward between that Lake and Salt Lake City, I had occasion to stop once over night with Gurney Brown,

in Draper, about nineteen miles south of Salt Lake City. Being somewhat fatigued after the day's journey, I retired to rest quite early, and while I still lay wide awake in my bed I heard a voice calling me by name, and then saying, "The handcart people are in trouble and you are wanted; will you go and help them?" I turned instinctively in the direction from whence the voice came and beheld an ordinary sized man in the room. Without any hesitation I answered, "Yes, I will go if I am called." I then turned around to go to sleep, but had laid only a few minutes when the voice called a second time, repeating almost the same as before. This was repeated a third time.

When I got up the next morning I said to Brother Brown, "The handcart people are in trouble, and I have promised to go out and help them;" but I did not tell him of my experience during the night.

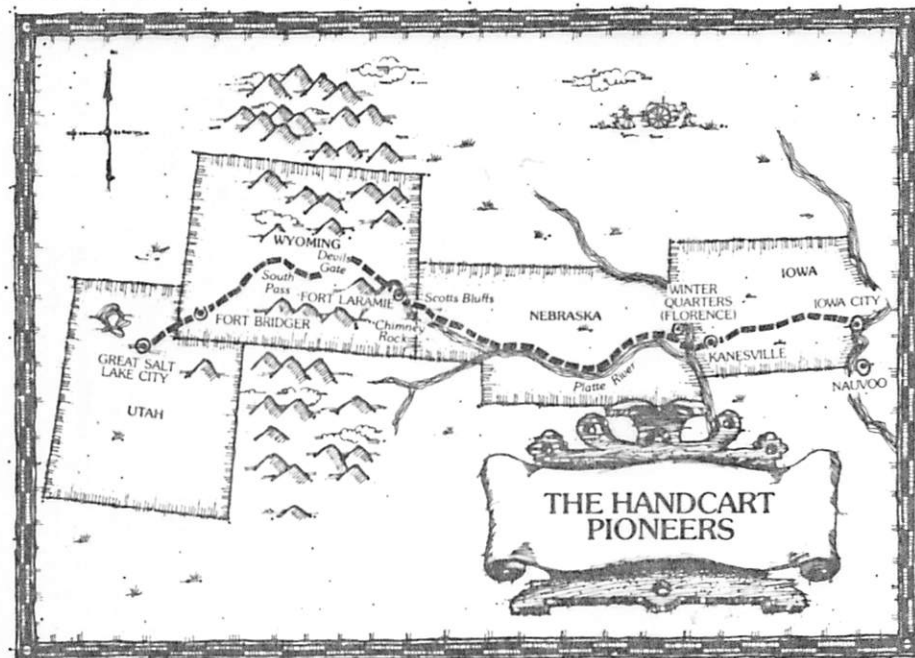
I now hastened to Salt Lake City, and arrived there on the Saturday, preceding the Sunday on which the call was made for volunteers to go out and help the last handcart companies in. When some of the brethren responded by explaining that they could get ready to start in a few days; I spoke out at once saying, "I am ready now!" The next day I was wending my way eastward over the

mountains with a light wagon all alone.

The terrific storm which caused the immigrants so much suffering and loss overtook me near the South Pass, where I stopped three days with Reddick N. Allred, who had come out with provisions for the immigrants. The storm during these three days was simply awful. In all my travels in the Rocky Mountains both before and afterwards, I have seen no worse. When the snow at length ceased falling, it lay on the ground so deep that for many days it was impossible to move wagons through it.

Being deeply concerned about the possible fate of the immigrants, and feeling anxious to learn of their condition, I determined to start out on horseback to meet them; and for this purpose I secured a pack-saddle and two animals, (one to ride and one to pack), from Brother Allred, and began to make my way slowly through the snow, alone. After traveling for some time I met Joseph A. Young and one of the Garr boys, two of the relief company which had been sent out from Salt Lake City to help the companies. They had met the immigrants and were now returning with important dispatches from the camps to the headquarters of the Church, reporting the awful condition of the companies.

In the meantime I continued my lonely journey, and the night after meeting Elders Young and Garr, I camped in the snow in the mountains. As I was preparing to make a bed in the snow with the few articles that my pack animal carried for me, I thought how comfortable a buffalo robe would be on such an occasion, and also how I could relish a little buffalo meat for supper, and before lying down for the night I was instinctively led to ask the Lord to send me a buffalo. Now, I am a firm believer in the efficacy of prayer, for I have on many different occasions asked the Lord for blessings, which He in his mercy has bestowed upon me. But when I, after praying as I did on that lonely night in the South Pass, looked around me and spied a buffalo bull within fifty yards of my camp, my surprise was complete; I





"The hand-cart emigrants in a storm" (from T.B.H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints* [New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1873] p. 309)

had certainly not expected so immediate an answer to my prayer. However, I soon collected myself and was not at a loss to know what to do. Taking deliberate aim at the animal, my first shot brought him down, he made a few jumps only, and then rolled down into the very hollow where I was encamped. I was soon busily engaged skinning my game; finishing which, I spread the hide on the snow and placed my bed upon it. I next prepared supper, eating the tongue and other choice parts of the animal I had killed, to my heart's content. After this I enjoyed a refreshing night's sleep, while my horses were browsing on the sage brush.

Early the next morning I was on my way again, and soon reached what is known as the Ice Springs Bench. There I happened upon a herd of buffalo and killed a nice cow. . . . I reached the ill-fated train just as the immigrants were camping for the night. The sight that met my gaze as I entered their camp can never be erased from my memory. The starved forms and haggard countenances of the poor sufferers, as they moved about slowly, shivering with cold, to prepare their scanty evening meal, was enough to touch the stoutest heart. When they saw me coming, they hailed me with joy inexpressible, and when they further

beheld the supply of fresh meat I brought into their camp, their gratitude knew no bounds. Flocking around me, one would say, "Oh, please give me a small piece of meat;" Another would exclaim, "My poor children are starving, do give me a little;" and children with tears in their eyes would call out, "Give me some, give me some." At first I tried to wait on them and handed out the meat as they called for it; but finally I told them to help themselves. Five minutes later both my horses had been released of their extra burden—the meat was all gone, and the next few hours found the people in camp busily engaged cooking and eating it, with thankful hearts.

A prophecy had been made by one of the brethren that the company should feast on buffalo meat, when their provisions might run short; my arrival in their camp, loaded with meat, was the beginning of the fulfillment of that prediction; but only the beginning, as I afterwards shot and killed a number of buffalo for them as we journeyed along. ["Church Emigration," *Contributor*, Mar. 1893, pp. 202–3]

Traveling with the Martin handcart company was a thirteen-year-old English girl, Mary Goble Pay, who, with her parents and five brothers and sisters,

had emigrated from England that spring. She gives this vivid description of the ordeal of the company:

We traveled from 15 to 25 miles a day. We used to stop one day in the week to wash. On Sunday we would hold our meetings and rest. Every morning and night we were called to prayers by the bugle. . . .

We traveled on till we got to the Platt River. That was the last walk I ever had with my mother. We caught up with Handcart companies that day. We watched them cross the river. There were great lumps of ice floating down the river. It was bitter cold. The next morning there were fourteen dead in camp through the cold. We went back to camp and went to prayers. We sang the song "Come, Come, Ye Saints, No Toil Nor Labor Fear." I wondered what made my mother cry. That night my mother took sick and the next morning my little sister was born. It was the 23rd of September. We named her Edith and she lived six weeks and died for want of nourishment.

We had been without water for several days, just drinking snow water. The captain said there was a spring of fresh water just a few miles away. It was snowing hard, but my mother begged me to go and get her a drink. Another lady went with me. We were about half way to the spring when we found an old man who had fallen in the snow. He was frozen so stiff, we could not lift him, so the lady told me where to go and she would go back to camp for help for we knew he would soon be frozen if we left him. When she had gone I began to think of the Indians and looking and looking in all directions. I became confused and forgot the way I should go. I waded around in the snow up to my knees and I became lost. Later when I did not return to camp the men started out after me. It was 11:00 p.m. o'clock before they found me. My feet and legs were frozen. They carried me to camp and rubbed me with snow. They put my feet in a bucket of water. The pain was so terrible. The frost came out of my legs and feet but did not come out of my toes. We traveled in the snow from the

last crossing of the Platt River. We had orders not to pass the handcart companies. We had to keep close to them to help them if we could. We began to get short of food and our cattle gave out. We could only travel a few miles a day. When we started out of camp in the morning the brethren would shovel the snow to make a track for our cattle. They were weak for the want of food as the buffaloes were in large herds by the road and ate all the grass.

When we arrived at Devil's Gate it was bitter cold. We left lots of our things there. There were two or three log houses there. . . . My brother James ate a hearty supper as well as he ever was when he went to bed. In the morning he was dead.

My feet were frozen also my brother Edwin and my sister Caroline had their feet frozen. It was nothing but snow. We could not drive the pegs in the ground for our tents. Father would clean a place for our tents and put snow around to keep it down. We were short of flour but father was a good shot. They called him the hunter of the camp. So that helped us out. We could not get enough flour for bread as we got only a quarter of a pound per head a day, so we would make it like thin gruel. We called it "skilly."

There were four companies on the plains. We did not know what would become of us. One night a man came to our camp and told us there would be plenty of flour in the morning for Bro. Young had sent men and teams to help us. There was rejoicing that night. We sang songs, some danced and some cried. His name was Ephriam Hanks. We thought he was a living Santa Claus.

We traveled faster now that we had horse teams. My mother had never got well, she lingered until the 11 of December, the day we arrived in Salt Lake City 1856. She died between the Little and Big Mountain. She was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. She was 43 years old. She and her baby lost their lives gathering to Zion in such a late season of the year. My sister was buried

at the last crossing of the Sweet Water.

We arrived in Salt Lake City nine o'clock at night the 11th of December 1856. Three out of four that were living were frozen. My mother was dead in the wagon.

Bishop Hardy had us taken to a home in his ward and the brethren and the sisters brought us plenty of food. We had to be careful and not eat too much as it might kill us we were so hungry.

Early next morning Bro. Brigham Young and a doctor came. The doctor's name was Williams. When Bro. Young came in he shook hands with us all. When he saw our condition—our feet frozen and our mother dead—tears rolled down his cheeks.

The doctor amputated my toes using a saw and a butcher knife. Brigham Young promised me I would not have to have any more of my feet cut off. The sisters were dressing mother for the last time. Oh how did we stand it? That afternoon she was buried. ["Autobiography of Mary Goble Pay," in *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints*, comp. Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, pp. 143-45]

In spite of the tragedies of the Willie and Martin handcart companies, handcart migration continued until 1860. Between 1856 and 1860 ten companies with 2,962 immigrants walked and pushed their small carts across the plains. Then President Brigham Young announced in 1860 that missionaries would be called to travel east with flour and other provisions to sell on eastern markets and that immigrants would return with them in the fall. Following a call from the prophet, 293 men went east in 1861 with 200 wagons containing nearly 72 tons of flour. They were organized into ten companies and returned in the fall with the immigrant Saints who desired to come to Zion that year. In 1863, 488 men with 384 wagons and 118 tons of flour went east and brought immigrants west. In 1868, the Perpetual Emigration Fund raised \$70,000 and sent men and teams to Laramie City, Wyoming, since the Union Pacific Railroad had reached

that far west. Four thousand immigrants returned with the wagons. On 8 March 1869, the Union Pacific Railroad arrived at Ogden, Utah, and formally ended the necessity of Church trains.

Even though immigration continued, the coming of the railroad marked the end of the pioneer period. Between the years 1847 and 1887, when immigration was no longer formally encouraged, over seventy-eight thousand men, women, and children came to Zion with the help of the Perpetual Emigration Fund. The pioneers experienced extreme hardship, suffering, and death; but they paid the price willingly to follow the prophet of the living God. They were human beings with human frailties. Very few of them ever realized any material rewards in this life from the great sacrifice they made, but they sought far more than physical comfort and prosperity. Vilate C. Raile immortalized their efforts in her centennial tribute to them:

They cut desire into short lengths
And fed it to the hungry fires of courage.

Long after, when the flames had died,

Molten gold gleamed in the ashes.
They gathered it into bruised palms
And handed it to their children
And their children's children forever.

[As quoted in T. Edgar Lyon, "Some Uncommon Aspects of the Mormon Migration," *Improvement Era*, Sept. 1969, p. 33]

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why were the pioneers willing to sacrifice everything for the gospel, even their own lives?
2. What were their earthly rewards? Their eternal rewards?
3. Why was the Perpetual Emigration Fund such an important part of the gathering?
4. Why did the pioneer Saints feel a need to gather?
5. Why was the building of temples such an integral part of the gathering?
6. How do the challenges faced by us differ from those faced by our pioneer Saints? How are they the same?